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The Family and Education

1987 New Family Movement World Conference Castelgandolfo, Italy
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4 *ONLY ONE TEACHER: Chiara Lubi delivered the keynote address presenting Jesus the Teacher as a model for education in the family.*

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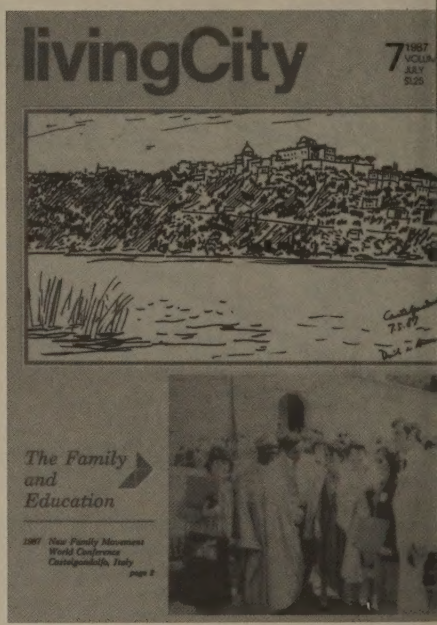

Cover drawing by Danilo Zanzucchi: view o Castelgandolfo, Italy where the Internationa New Family Congress took place.

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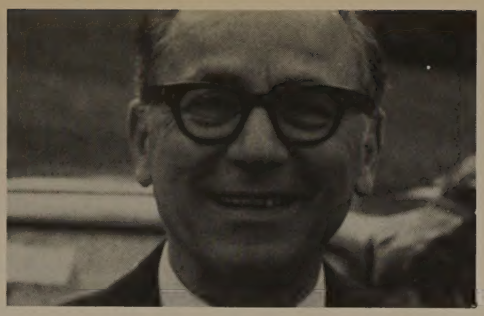

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THE FAMILY AND EDUCATION

PART I

To help our readers participate in some way in this special moment, we will begin in this issue and continue in the next to give an overview presentation of the Family and Education Congress held at the Mariapolis Center of Castelgandolfo, Italy the 2nd and 3rd of May.

About 2300 people coming from fifty-three nations took part in this congress sponsored by the New Family Movement of the Focolare. You could tell that the participants—ranging in age from very young couples with infants in their arms to mature persons who had already gone through the joyful or painful experience of raising a family—had not come together just by chance, or simply because they were interested in family education on a professional level. The great majority were in fact part of the New Family Movement and therefore were prepared by the effort of living a spirituality of unity based on the Gospel, on faithfulness to the teachings of the Church, and possessing great ecumenical thrust and openness.

"Who are our children"? This was the question that the participants asked themselves. We hear a lot about children in the news nowadays. Unfortunately what we hear relates to child abuse, missing children, and endless court litigations over child custody. Good news does not circulate as fast and as widely. For this reason it was refreshing, and I would say impressive, to participate in a congress which—without hiding the difficulties and the problems involved in raising a family—offered positive experiences and possible solutions for a deeper bond between parents and children and among generations.

The presence of children in a family always calls parents back to the truth of life in every moment, especially as they go through the different phases of adolescence. Children, it was said, contribute to the education of the family as a whole and help parents to verify the soundness of the values proposed and lived. Children are a gift for families and for society, a gift of God compelling parents to love one another and

(top right) The newly renovated hall of the Mariapolis Center of Castelgandolfo, Italy as seen from the stage.
(above) An interval in the 17th century gardens adjacent to the hall.

to be love for others. For most of the people present at Castelgandolfo during these days it was logical to refer to the mutual love of which Jesus spoke, which brings about the fulfillment of his own promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

This presence of Jesus in the family was mentioned by many: Jesus, the Teacher, as Chiara Lubich who opened the congress described him. The experiences shared bore witness to the sincerity of a life based on the effort to have Jesus present in the family at all times. This did not exclude the contribution human sciences can make, as well as the different cultures in which each person who spoke was deeply rooted. It was quite a gift to hear people of all races and from so many different countries share suffering which was filled with hope, or speak with an enthusiasm that was not euphoric. One couple spoke along with their adolescent daughter, for instance, and the unity among them was powerful. Powerful was the fact that this life has been going on in different people—not all present here today—for over forty years, which means two generations.

Nobody can deny that the situation of the family is serious and a lot has to be done, but I have the impression that we all left Castelgandolfo —after an intense and beautiful weekend—with a renewed sense of hope as if we had witnessed a new springtime similar to the one in bloom around the Mariapolis Center.

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Sharry Silvi

Only One Teacher

Chiara Lubich opened the two day congress. In her keynote address which follows she presents Jesus the Teacher as a model for education in the family.

Dear friends,

I would like to begin by greeting all of you, especially those who have come from a distance.

The congress called by our New Family Movement is beginning today. The topic will be, "The family and education." My brief talk this morning is meant to be simply an introduction to such an important topic.

This congress will examine the topic in-depth from different points of view. I would like to place the foundation for the program to follow. If this foundation is applied to life, I believe that everything will acquire more value and true value.

Speaking of education, we logically find ourselves before two subjects: the educator, the teacher who must teach, who must educate and the disciple, who must be educated.

With regard to the educator or teacher there is a phrase of the Gospel which makes us think and which can shed light also on the education which should be imparted to the family. The sentence is: "One among is your teacher, the rest are learners" (Mt 23:8). For Jesus there is only one teacher and this is he himself. This does not mean that he denies the presence of authority, of paternity but rather that it must be interpreted, not as authority to dominate or exert power but as service. The reason for this is that in service, which is love, it is not only the human person who acts, but Christ himself in the individual. Christ, then, continues to be the primary Teacher.

If Jesus is the Teacher, it follows that one of the duties of Christian parents is that of looking to him in order to learn how to educate.

What type of educator was Jesus? Several important characteristics emerge from Jesus as Teacher. First of all, he gives example; he himself incarnates his doctrine. He does not impose burdens which he himself does not first carry: "Woe to you," he says, "you lay impossible burdens on men but will not lift a finger to lighten them!" (Luke 11:46). Jesus put into practice what he asked of others.

Looking at him, we can deduce that the first way to educate—and this applies also to parents—should not focus so much on instructing or correcting, but on living with total commitment one's own life as a Christian. Parents must put into practice what they then ask of their children. Do they ask for sincerity, commitment, loyalty, obedience, charity towards others, chastity, patience and forgiveness? Children should find these qualities, first of all, in their parents. Children should always be able to find in their mothers and fathers indisputable models to which they can relate.

Another characteristic of the way Jesus educated is that he concretely helped his friends, for example, as he did when he calmed the storm on the lake (cf. Luke 8:24).

Parents who naturally do all they can for their children, will be able to do even more and above all, do it much better, if they add supernatural love to their love, if they love with the charity of God, with the charity of one who takes the initiative in loving, without expecting anything in return. This is a kind of love which never leaves others indifferent.

Moreover, Jesus instilled confidence in the people he taught, as we can conclude from his words to the adulteress: "You may go. But from now on, avoid this sin" (John 8:11). He believed that it was possible for this woman to begin a morally correct life.

The words of parents should always give encouragement, be positive and full of hope. Their words ought to express all their confidence in their children's ability to start over again new.

Jesus left each person free and responsible to make his or her own decisions, as he did when he met the rich young man (cf.Mt 19:16). We should never impose our ideas, but offer them with love, as expressions of love. First and foremost, our children are children of God, not ours. They should not be treated, therefore, as our possessions, but as persons who have been entrusted to us.

Jesus does not hesitate to correct with firmness when necessary. He said to Peter, who wanted to turn him away from facing his passion: "Get out of my sight, you satan! ... You are not judging by God's standards but by man's!" (Mt 16:23).

Also correction is necessary. It is an integral part of education: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him takes care to chastise him," as is written in the sacred book of Proverbs (chapter 13 verse 24). God who himself formed the Hebrew people as a Father and Teacher, gave an education that consisted in instruction and in correction.

It would be terrible if we did not correct! We would be responsible for such an omission! A passage from the prophet Ezekiel is always striking: "If I tell the wicked man that he shall surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade the wicked man from his way, he shall die for his guilt, but I will hold you responsible for his death (Ezekiel 33:8). Correction is therefore the duty of parents. Admonishment given with peace, calm and detachment increases the sense of responsibility on the part of the children who will remember it.

In the stupendous parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus showed us the mercy of the Father and therefore, also His mercy toward those who return to what is good, towards those who repent. Parents should act toward their children as God acts toward us.

A father and mother in a family need to be merciful to the point of truly forgetting, of "enduring all things" (1 Cor 13:7) as the love of God does. Repeated reminders of past mistakes are not in line with Jesus' way of thinking. We can understand then why they are not accepted.

Jesus taught in the synagogues, on the mountain, along the roads of Galilee and Judea, in the temple of Jerusalem. Likewise, parents can be their children's teachers anywhere.

Jesus' way of expressing himself was new, although he kept to the customs of his time. The language he used was lively, filled with images, concrete, brief and precise. He avoided any kind of long-windedness. He often condensed into one ►

phrase all that he had to say on a particular subject.

This is the way it should be also in the family. The so-called long "sermon" is not accepted by our young people. A few words are enough, offered by a true, pure and selfless love. Jesus also used dialogue, alternating questions and answers. He used maxims, and with the Scribes and Pharisees, he discussed.

The dialogue between parents and children, whether they be very young or adults, ought never to be broken. Communication should always be open, serene and constructive as between friends.

It often happens that children distance themselves from their parents or even from their faith despite the witness given by parents who have tried to live according to the Gospel. The relationship with these sons and daughters should never be broken no matter what path they take, even if they follow ideologies which are far from God; even if they are involved in drugs, or in experiences radically in contrast with the moral teaching they received in the family.

Particularly in the West, we are immersed in a secularized society in which important traditional values count little, and others are emerging. For example, there is a stronger awareness of personal freedom, great interest in scientific and technological progress, a new grasp of the role of women in today's society as compared to the past. Cultural and national barriers are surpassed, and so on.

Parents need to be able to discern in dialogue with their children, they need to be mindful of the profound changes that have taken place in the context their children are living in.

They need to know how to discern the "signs of the times" which some of the new demands of their children express.

In educating people, Jesus was not afraid to overturn the traditional scale of values, as when he announced the beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:2). He called "happy," in fact, those who do not appear to be so. He presented a path which is difficult to take, and in opposition to what the world offers.

We also must have the courage to speak up about what is truly of value. We must not deceive ourselves, thinking that by presenting a watered-down Christianity, a non-existent Christ, our ideas will be more readily accepted.

God makes himself heard in the hearts of our children. They react positively only to the truth, when it is presented to them in a language that is accessible and acceptable to them, when it is expressed by parents, who before teaching, have made the effort to understand and to share in the legitimate demands of the new generations.

The Gospel shows us Jesus who spoke "with authority" (Mt 7:29). Parents, trusting in the grace that they have as parents, must never neglect their responsibility as educators. Deep down in their hearts, children expect this of them. It is for this very reason that children are often capable of harshly judging their parents if they have been silent about the truth.

Jesus educated by passing on to his disciples "his" teaching: "This is my commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). By specifying "as I have loved you," Jesus presents himself as the "Teacher" of such love.

This must be the teaching, par excellence, which also parents must give to their children, because it is the synthesis of the Gospel. Parents ought to imitate Jesus so well in putting it into practice, that they can repeat this commandment to their children as their own: my

Chiara here greets some of the civil authorities who attended the congress.

children, love one another as I have loved you.

We must imitate Jesus, then; imitate him as Teacher; imitate Jesus, or better still, allow him to live in us. Yes, by far, the best way would be if Jesus himself took our place. If he lives in us, our efforts as educators will be beyond reproach. If he becomes the educator in our families, we will have carried out our responsibility perfectly.

Jesus must live in us, he must take our place. How can this come about? The Gospel instructed us in this regard. We were still at the beginning of our new way of life when the Lord urged us to turn it into a divine adventure in which he would be present in us. Then, little by little, implanting in our minds the various ideas that gave rise to the spirituality of unity, the Spirit explained to us how this could become a reality.

Now all those who follow this way know how they should act so that Jesus might be in them. We must live our "new selves", not our "old selves." We must love in a supernatural way, being "outside of ourselves," as we say, always, overcoming the obstacles that come up, by loving Jesus crucified and forsaken. We should not live for ourselves but for others, "making ourselves one" with them in everything except sin. All these expressions tell us how Jesus can live in us. Jesus already present in our soul through grace is more fully present because of our response. Yes, by living in this way, Jesus is in us, Jesus the Teacher.

But Jesus must also live among us in our families. This is the presence of Jesus that comes about through unity, wherever two or more are united in his name (cf. Mt 18:20): Jesus between husband and wife; between mother and son; between father and daughter; between the mother and the grandfather or the aunt.... If Jesus is present among two or more members of our family, his influence as Teacher and Educator will be greater.

How can we guarantee this precious presence of his in our midst? We know the answer: by nourishing it every day, by rebuilding unity whenever it has been broken, and by keeping ourselves open to one another, and even more, by going out of ourselves toward the other members of our family. I say, going out of ourselves toward others because in a family, the first neighbors to love are the members of one's own family.

In fact, whether we are adherents, or volunteers or married focolarini of the Movement, we know that the task that the charism of unity urges us to fulfill is that of making this basic unit of society become a focolare. This is our specific, characteristic vocation. We will not reach sanctity unless we aim at this.

Precisely because we have put aside everything, at least spiritually, in order to follow Jesus—"If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his father and mother, his wife and ►

his children, his brothers and sisters, indeed his very self, he cannot be my follower" (Luke 14:26)—we now hear him repeating to us these words: You do not love me if you do not love your family, first of all. Thus, whether we are alone or whether others in our family live our Ideal, Jesus, the Teacher, will be present there.

The children who grow up in these families will be a new generation. Together with the life and nourishment they receive from their parents, with all the affection and assistance that this first unit of society offers, they will also be imbued with many ideas of Jesus, evangelical ideas.

Consequently, they will grow up reasoning as he reasons. They will learn to see humanity as the great family of the sons and daughters of God. They will not believe blindly in other systems; they will believe in the Gospel. Relationships will not attract them unless they are based on the new commandment of Jesus. These children will be new.

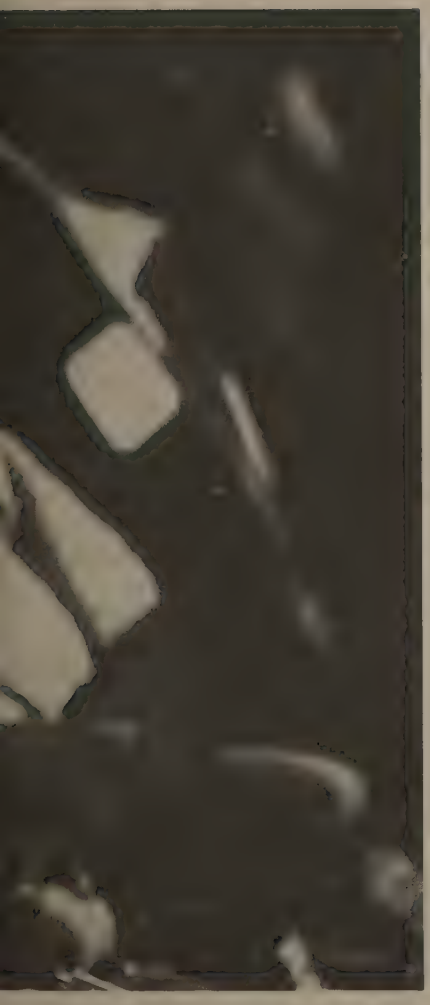
Thus the divine life received in baptism will be strengthened. Parents will put into action the graces that the sacrament of matrimony has placed at their disposal for the good of their children. Parents will collaborate with God in the development and growth of his children.

Let us educate, and thereby transform the children and the entire family! Let us make the family a small church, a dynamic reality open to the society around it and its needs, orienting the children to look beyond themselves, to others and their needs!

It is a very high goal, and in certain cases, it may seem to be unattainable. But one should never despair. On the contrary, one should work confidently toward its realization. To understand what should be done, let us look at how the Spirit urged the entire Work of Mary[1] to act, in order to make all one, one focolare.

In our Movement, we also

The 2,300 persons coming from fifty-three nations filled the hall to capacity.



have persons of other Christian traditions, of other religions, and non-believers. We love them as we love ourselves. We joyfully accept the commitments that they spontaneously take in order to be an integral part of our large family. We share with them all the spiritual and material patrimony of the Movement. We are the Work of Mary because they, too, are present. Without them, we would lose our identity.

It must be like this in our families, as well. Whoever is a little distant from this or from any other Christian ideal, whoever has other ideas or another faith, must be welcomed by us not only with human love, but with supernatural love.

We ought to treasure and appreciate whatever they give to the family, however small it may be. We must learn to highlight the constructive ideas they have, and include these children, as much as possible, in the spiritual and material riches of the family.

In short, we should do all we can to love this child or these children, so that although they may not have yet received the light of faith, they return love in some way, and the family becomes an expression of the Work of Mary.

Moreover, to make of the family a small unit of the Work of Mary or a small church, which is synonymous, means to imitate the family of Nazareth, that family which lived with Jesus in the midst in the most concrete and divine way.

In order to compose this masterpiece, the members of the family of Nazareth loved one another in a supernatural way, which means out of love for God and not for themselves. Mary, who was the mother of Jesus and the wife of Joseph, loved both of them not for herself, but for God. Joseph did not love Mary for himself. He loved her for God, as he loved the child Jesus for God, even though he was his foster father.

Yes, to love God. Our love is truly purified from human attachments if our spirit is always turned toward Jesus Forsaken.

My dear friends, I could continue to demonstrate how all the elements of our spirituality are most suitable for guiding the life of the family. But you know this. Yes, with our Ideal, we can have *the* Teacher in our home.

Today, let us renew the resolution to have him always among us. On this foundation, everything that is offered to you by science and by experiences in the pedagogical field will also acquire value.

May Our Lady give us many united families for the good of society and of the Church. Through these families we will have, besides all the rest, a powerful means of spreading the kingdom of God in the world.

And reaching out to other families and to all of humanity will make the family ever more beautiful, more united and more holy. And isn't this what God wants in our time which calls for mature and holy laity?

Chiara Lubich

1) The name by which the Focolare Movement was officially approved in 1962.

Mariuccia and Benedetto Pietrogrande from Milan.

Continuing with the program, theme-experiences were presented which touched on fundamental areas of family life. The following are excerpts.

Who Are You, My Child?

It truly seems to be impossible to define and to express the meaning of what a child is. We can have an intuition of this, we can draw near to its meaning, we can contemplate a mystery: the mystery that every human being contains, the plan created by the love of God which takes flesh through a father and a mother: a mystery of Love.

Parents welcome the wonder of conception, birth and growth of a person called to life by the Creator who wants him or her to be in His image. Every child is a unique and original project to whom the parents give a body, a family circle and a history. It is beautiful to think that creation continues and takes its place in our time and through our persons.

Who are you, my child? When you discover particular features in your children, you say that they resemble you. Likewise, when they manifest certain shortcomings and faults, you say that they resemble you.

But when you realize that, despite their impulsiveness, they succeed in controlling themselves; when, going beyond an offense, they know how to forgive; when they stand up for a friend; when they are capable of gratitude for the trust you have shown; when they do not get upset over your shortcomings; when they are able to grasp the meaning of life also as they go through the contradictions of their growing years, then you discern other features: a new person is taking form.

Mariuccia and Benedetto Pietrogrande from Milan

The Creative Process of Love

The experience that has matured over the years in the families of the Movement has demonstrated that "making ourselves one" or "living the other," which the spirituality of unity underlines, is one of the fundamental points also for relationships with our children.

In other words, it is a matter of loving them not for ourselves, but for themselves, with a love that tends to be similar to the love of God, their Father and our Father.

"Actually, we are inclined by nature to love our children, but in one way or another, we expect something in return. Thus we find that we have to continually renew our resolution to detach ourselves from our plans, from our desires, keeping our gaze fixed on God, because only in him can we find the way for a right and full relationship with them.

This attempt to bring our love onto a supernatural plane does not in any way diminish or undervalue the natural affection that we have, as we love our children with the heart of a

Francois Robert from Paris.

mother or father. On the contrary, our humanity finds a greater fulfillment.

The first fruit of our making ourselves one is that it enables us to welcome, understand and accept our children as they are.

To make ourselves one with our children as much as possible, does not mean, however, that we should abandon them, giving them a false freedom which is not at all the freedom they really want.

If we want to love our children a little bit like God loves them, we can not allow ourselves to pressure them, not even when it is for their own happiness and for what we consider to be their true good.

We feel that the best way to truly leave our children free is to commit ourselves deeply to becoming free ourselves.

In fact, we realize how many obstacles we encounter in ourselves as we try to live "the life of the others," and in particular, that of our children.

The desire to make ourselves one with our children, to understand their needs and behavior also helps us to have an understanding and give a positive evaluation of their generation.

Making ourselves one roots us in the present, without pointless moments of nostalgia or regrets about the past, without anxiety and exaggerated concern for the future. It urges us, therefore, to always look at our children as if they were new.

Simonetta and Piergiorgio Colonnetti from Rome

The Teacher in the Home

Naturally, in the task of educating our children, the contributions of psychology and pedagogy should be taken into account. The basic element of every educative act, however, should be mutual love between the couple, as the Gospel proposes, which calls for the presence of Jesus as much as we are able to do so. It is up to us parents, first of all, to foster a love for one another that is as deep, pure, continuous, total and unconditional as possible.

This basis leads each of the parents, first of all, to go "against the current" with respect to some modes of life today, to free themselves from the very strong influence of society around them.

If we parents are united in the name of Jesus, we present not so much ourselves to our children as models to imitate, but rather him: a model who will never let them down. Our authority even will be different. Christ, in fact, is "an adult," whose authority is not oppressive. On the contrary, his authority helps us to grow and is liberating.

The harmony between parents and the constant effort to keep the presence of Jesus among them is, and remains, in every circumstance of life, a strong reference point for the children.

Even if there are breaches which seem to be irremediable and misunderstandings which seem permanent and irrevocable, the nostalgia of that kind of relationship, of that Presence, remains in the children.

Francois Robert from Paris

Education: a look to the future

The Congress also touched on the relationship between families and other agents of education such as schools, youth organizations, the media. In a brief report Anna Friso invited the participants to send experiences and research matter on the topic so that it could serve for future conferences.

Broader coverage was given to the stimulating prospective that the culture of the future opens up to the issue of education. Conducted by Alberto Friso, the panel involved experts and dealt with the relationship between family, education, technology, nature, psychology. The following are excerpts.

Giulio Meazzini
Informatics Researcher

Our present and future culture has and will have to contend always more with telematics, i.e. the transmission of information over distances. The approach that we still have today with information from wherever it may come, is passive e.g. the recipient receives news from newspapers, television, etc.

The advent of the computer is changing all of this. It is becoming always more frequent to hear youngsters talk about programs and personal computers. Are they all geniuses? No, simply youngsters alert to making the best use of their new toys.

The world will truly undergo a revolution when these younger generations will become adults. Adults at this point are not able to adequately educate children as to the use of the computer because it is something too new and in continual evolution.

In the immediately foreseeable future, the computer will be a formidable instrument of communication linking places all over the globe. Each person from their home will become a protagonist, and change the ways of working, putting on productions, the way of living each day.

Think of the effect—even though it is on a limited scale—that amateur radio operators have.

Tomorrow each person, through their own computer monitor, will be able to transmit and receive from any other person in the world. At this point the computer will become an irreplaceable means of socialization and participation.

Vito Bianco
Teacher of Agriculture

The relationship between nature and humankind is revealing itself to be not only more complex but also always more interdependent. The image of man who lives off the spontaneous fruits of the earth or of the farmer who sows and reaps on his own little plot of land are giving way to a vision in which the individual and the earth are in dialogue with one another, in which the work of the individual and the response of the earth involve not only individuals but all of humanity.

Herein lie the reasons why a planetarian dimension is necessary: 1. pollution knows no boundaries; 2. so as to make better choices of complementary products. Herein also lies the need for interdisciplinary research in which economics, biology, physics, and engineering can, in reciprocal stimulation and conditioning, rediscover their own relativity in regard to the one fundamental problem of human beings who seek through history and their own belief system to become always more fulfilled persons.

Michele De Beni
Psychologist and Pedagogist

In the area of scientific research applied to problems of pedagogy and educational psychology, we are assisting an authentic change in mentality. We have become deeply convinced that the quality of life, culture, and progress will depend always more on the quality of education. Moreover, in order for educators to express their greatest potential they will have always greater need of the contribution of all the other sciences.

Herein lies the importance for educators to be rich in humanity as well as competent and professionally updated. Today humanity is paying a very high price to a civilization that shortcuts its own rhythms and structures, its own values for the sake of efficiency and production, and risks creating a dehumanized society. For this reason it will be necessary for families, communities, and nations to direct greater efforts and resources in the service of education.

"Investing in education" should become significantly more important than our emphasis on production.

Mariele Quartana
from the New Humanity Movement

We are immersed in all the human realities, in all the fields of society, engrafted in the various types of cultures and maintain not a fearful but a trusting eye on the historical reality. We are witnessing a multiplication of constructive energies capable of making headway in the entanglement of opposing disintegrating forces.

We feel deeply involved—on a personal and collective level—in giving our contribution so that humanity take the road of real growth, so that individuals might be fulfilled in their life together with others and in their governing together for the common good. These are the results of history's journey over centuries as shown in all that we have come to understand, the discoveries, the findings of science and technology.

We are constant witness to many signs indicating that this new consciousness is being formed and is giving shape to a new culture.

In conclusion, from where do we draw the strength to lead us on in this direction? It comes from the positive view we have of reality on its journey, together with the growing awareness that we are not alone. In two ways we are not alone: 1) there is God whom we have discovered as Love and as being present; 2) there are many others who are travelling with us.

□

"We are constant witness to many signs indicating that this new consciousness is being formed and is giving shape to a new culture."

THE MARIAN DIMENSION

Mary and Child: Lorenzetti

What was Pope John Paul II's intention in offering the encyclical Redemptoris Mater (Mother of the Redeemer) *to the world at this point in time?*

by Enrique Cambon

On March 25th an encyclical on Mary in the life of the pilgrim Church was released. The context of its publication is the Marian Year which began June 7, 1987 and will end August 15, 1988. It's the Pope's sixth encyclical, after *Laborem exercens* in 1981, a social encyclical; *Slavorum apostoli* in 1985 dedicated to Saints Cyril and Methodius on the missions and relationships between cultures and the Gospel; and what is called the Trinitarian trilogy: *Redemptor hominis* in 1979 dedicated to Christ; *Dives in misericordia* in 1980 to the Father; *Dominum et vivificantem* in 1986 dedicated to the Holy Spirit. This latest one called *Redemptoris Mater* constitutes a broad biblical meditation and covers the mariological themes of Vatican II. There is continuity with previous documents, particularly those of Pope Paul VI.

To avoid basing our opinion on a partial or superficial view gleaned from what we may hear or read in the papers, we'd like to take a deeper look at the encyclical's significance.

The Ecumenical Aspect

The will to make ecumenism an irreversible fact has been clearly affirmed by the Catholic Church. Which, then, are the ecumenical aspects of this Marian encyclical? That the encyclical was written from a Catholic frame of reference is evident, yet an ecumenical dimension is clearly there. This is especially apparent in reference to the Eastern Oriental Churches. There is not a great deal that explicity refers to the Churches of the Reformation but the ecumenical importance of the document must be perceived on another level. Firstly in the biblical framework of the entire document and secondly in the numerous patristic references. It is said, in fact, that the ecumenical authority of the Church Fathers of the early centuries of Christianity is due not only to their holiness and theology but also to the fact that they are the "Fathers of Christians who were still all united." Lastly the figure of Mary is clearly set in the Christological and ecclesial dimension.

This fact made it possible for Max Thurian, a theologian of the Swiss Reformed Church among the most committed to ecumenical dialogue, to

conclude his commentary on the encyclical the day following its publication saying:"I think the encyclical provides an opportunity for many Christians who are still divided to reflect on the place Mary occupies in the mystery of Christ and of the Church."

Since contemplating the Mother of God, the document repeats, "brings us to a more profound understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation then the same must be said for the mystery of the Church ... clarifying each by the light of the other."[1]

The Social Aspects

In this regard the paragraphs dedicated to commenting the Magnificat are important. The Magnificat is full of social significance. In reference to it the encyclical says: "The Church's journey, therefore, near the end of the second Christian millennium, involves a renewed commitment.... The Church's preferential love for the poor is wonderfully inscribed in Mary's Magnificat." This thought concludes by citing text from the *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation:* "Mary ... at the side of her son, is the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation of humanity and of the universe. It is to her as Mother and model that the Church must look in order to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission."[2]

One newspaper—in reference to the above—wrote: "This is the 'green light' for liberation theologians but not for a political and marxist revolution." I think the implication is far greater. The encyclical and the Marian Year, the reality of Mary—if meditated in depth—draws us to look at what our specific contribution should be to the building of a world which is according to the plan of God. We should try to understand what it means on all levels that Mary is not only "a constant point of reference for the Church, for individuals and for communities," but also "for people and nations, and in a sense for all humanity."[3]

The reality of Mary draws us to look at what our specific contribution should be to the building of a world which is according to the plan of God.

We cannot but wonder what "the Marian dimension in the life of Christ's disciples"[4] may mean concretely for Christian thought, for an understanding of the role of the laity, of the place of women in society, of our way of relating to others, for evangelization, for the place of Christianity in culture, for social change.

In the vigorous portrayal of the reality of Mary presented here, we find one of the greatest challenges offered to Christians today. In this sense, the Marian Year constitutes a special invitation for reflection and for commitment.

Mary And The Word

A constant theme throughout the work is to present Mary as the model and figure of the Church and Christians.

Mary trod "a path,"[5] she made a pilgrimage,[6] a journey.[7] In this sense she "continues to go before the People of God."[8] The Christian and the Church will be more authentic followers of Christ if they will proceed along the path already trodden by the Virgin Mary.[9]

Several very strong expressions of the document shouldn't escape our attention because of the enormous ecumenical, social and pastoral consequences they imply. The words of Christ, "Blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it,"[10] and "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it,"[11] "refer precisely to Mary in a very special way. Is not Mary the first of "those who hear the word of God and do it?"... she accepted the Word of God because she believed it, because she was obedient to God, and because she 'kept' the word and 'pondered it in her heart' (cf. Lk 1:38-45; 2:19-51) and by means ►

of her whole life accomplished it."[13]

This leads to a very important conclusion: Mary in this way became "a true disciple of Christ,"[14] even more, she "became the first disciple of her Son."[15]

Therefore it can be said in the most authentic biblical sense that "Mary remains for the Church a 'permanent model."[16]

It has rightly been said in every possible way in Marian Catholic literature that Mary is a "door," that leads to Christ. The more one lives Mary the more one learns to follow and become another Christ. These concepts are reiterated in the encyclical. Mary is a true disciple of her son; her whole being is turned to point to Christ, to lead us to him. She is "entirely oriented toward Christ;"[17] her function is to "summon the faithful to her Son."[18]

The encyclical clearly states that if it is true that "only in the mystery of Christ is her mystery fully made clear,"[19] then equally true is the fact that "the mother of Christ presents herself as the spokeswoman of her Son's will—pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested."[20] With good reason an essential element of Mary's task can be discerned in her words at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you."[21]

A Maternal Presence In History

When we have come to know Mary in this sense, we can find an authentic personal relationship with her. "Let us imitate Mary, let's be the word of God put into practice"—Chiara Lubich wrote—"then we will be similar to her and spontaneously feel love toward her in our hearts."

A great love for Mary as Mother of the Church and humanity pervades the entire encyclical. Her presence in history is underscored: "Mary's solicitude for human beings, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs ... to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from evil."[22]

We cannot but wonder what "the Marian dimension in the life of Christ's disciples" may mean concretely for Christian thought, for an understanding of the role of the laity, for the place of women in society, for our way of relating to others.

We see her mediation in Christ in this context "as sharing in the one unique source that is the mediation of Christ Himself."[23]

We see Mary as a help and stimulus in the struggle against the forces of negativity, against the forces of death present in history and within us.

She leads us toward that "historical transformation which irreversibly continues: the transformation from "falling," to "rising."[24] This implies therefore that "Mary is not only the model and figure of the Church; she is much more."[25] She is Mother.

In this prospective "the various forms of Marian devotion"[26] can be understood and we can speak "of a specific 'geography' of faith and Marian devotion which includes all the special places of pilgrimage."[27] It is in this context as well that the "consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary [28] proposed by Pope John Paul II, acquires meaning. It is indeed "an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments."[29]

By means of the Marian year the Church is called not only to remember everything in her past that testifies to the special maternal cooperation of the Mother of God in the work of the salvation in Christ the Lord, but also, on her own part, to prepare for the future the paths of this cooperation. The end of the second Christian millennium opens up as a new prospect.[30]

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1) Encyclical Redemptor Mater, 30; 2) ibid. 37; 3) ibid. 6; 4) ibid. 45; 5) ibid. 14; 6) ibid. 6, 14; 7) ibid. 2, 14, 17; 8) ibid. 6; 9) ibid. 2; 10) Luke 11:28; 11) cf Luke 8:21; 12) cf. Luke 1:38-45, 2:19-51; 13) Redemptoris Mater 20; 14) ibid. 41; 15) ibid. 20; 16) ibid. 42; 17) ibid. 28; 18) ibid. 4; 19) ibid. 21; 20) John 2:5; 21) ibid. 21; 22) ibid. 38; 23) ibid. conclusion; 24) ibid. 44; 25) ibid. 2; 26) ibid. 28; 27) ibid. 48; 28) ibid. 26; 29) ibid. 48; 30) ibid. 49.

Images FOR words

courtesy of Italian Cultural Institute

"The fatigue of the past
is no longer ours,
because its time has gone;
what is to come we do not possess,
because we are not sure
if its time will ever come."

Catherine of Siena

A Prestigious Visit

The Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I of Constantinople will visit Pope John Paul II December 4 to 7, 1987. It is the first time since his election in July 1972 that Patriarch Demetrios will make official visits outside Turkey.

This will be a return visit since the Pope travelled to Constantinople to the seat of Patriarch Demetrios at the Phanar on November 30, 1979.

It will also be twenty years since the trip of his predecessor, Patriarch Athenagoras I to Rome in October 1967. This trip—as the bulletin Episkepsis relates—will be preceded by visits that the Patriarch will make in his capacity as "first among equals" to the sister Orthodox Churches.

After Rome, Demetrios I will go on to Canterbury, England where he will meet with Archbishop Runcie, head of the Anglican Communion. From there he will continue on to Geneva, to the headquarters of the World Council of Churches.

Patriarch Demetrios I, head of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Cardinal Willebrands is seen here accepting the Christian Unity Award from Father Carmen Giuliano, superior general of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

Cardinal Willebrands in the United States

On May 11, 1987 Cardinal Jan Willebrands, president of the Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, received the Christian Unity Award of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement in a ceremony held at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in New York City.

Returning to Apostolic Tradition

After five years of study the joint Catholic-Methodist Commission published a report entitled, "Toward a Declaration on the Church."

Kevin McDonald from the Vatican Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity commented on the documents and the future task of the Commission in the Roman Observer[1] "The documents first of all established several ecclesiological principles in common, secondly they clearly identified the differences which currently exist between Catholics and Methodists in their understanding of the Church.

These differences are especially concentrated on the subject of the episcopate in general and on the papacy in particular. Nonetheless, it was stated by both sides that the results achieved up to now not only justify but require further studies together. Considering the work that has been done it was decided that dialogue could be furthered by adopting as the next general topic, "The Apostolic Tradition." That would comprise the following subjects: "The Apostolic faith, its transmission through teachings and its reception; the sacramental office, ordination and the apostolic succession; Mary and the Church."

1) The Roman Observer 26/27 January 1987.

WORD OF LIFE

"Come to me
all you who are weary ...
for my yoke is easy and
my burden light"
(Mt 11:28-30).

"Come to me all you who are weary ... for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

This Word of life is one of the pearls of the Gospel of St. Matthew.

The weary Jesus is speaking to are the lowly, those without learning, power, and influence; they are the poor, the sick, those oppressed by injustice or discouraged by the occurrence of sin. He speaks to all those who are crushed under the weight of suffering. He came on earth to seek them out and bring them relief.

Here Jesus, however, is not merely showing himself as the liberator. He is pointing out that in order to feel free we need to accept his yoke, the yoke of "his" law, that is, to follow his teaching.

"Come to me all you who are weary ... for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

This Word of life may at first leave us surprised. Jesus affirms here that his yoke is easy yet we know that his teachings are rather demanding. He asks us to forgive our enemies, to love one another as he loved us and therefore to be ready to give our life for one another. He asks us to share our possessions with those in need, to put aside the persons and things dearest to us out of love for him, and to follow him along the way of the cross. These certainly are difficult things to put into practice.

"Come to me all you who are weary ... for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

We find the answer if we think that the Son of God came to share his divine life with us by which we can be transformed. Not only, he wants to give us his own capacity to love. Now, as he reiterated many times, there is only one way for us to share in his divine life: to put into practice his teachings.

If we live his words we will gradually be transformed into him. We will share in the always greater riches of his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who makes of us new persons. For this reason we will have a new strength to carry us beyond the oppressive circumstances we may find ourselves in.

"Come to me all you who are weary ... for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

Differently from many other Words of life which focused on a particular point of Jesus' teachings, this one invites us to have an inner attitude which embraces our whole life. It is docility, our entrusting ourselves to Jesus as to the one Teacher capable of giving true comfort to our souls.

How can we then put this Word of life into practice?

Whenever suffering, every suffering and burden, oppresses us let us turn to him and put into practice a sentence of his which adapts itself best to the situation at hand. At times it may be: "... take up your cross" (cf. Mt 16:24) and we can embrace what weighs us down in that moment. At other times it might be: "Today has troubles enough of its own" (Mt 6:34) and we will free ourselves from the troubles of tomorrow which concern us. The sentence might yet be: "Blest are the single-hearted" (Mt 5:8) and we will overcome the struggles of temptation or "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6:8) and we will stop worrying about daily needs....

Yes, there is a Word of his for every circumstance of our life. By putting it into practice we will experience the extent to which his yoke is easy and light.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

A true friend

Because of my credentials I was placed in a position of authority over other people who worked on my shift. Several of these people had worked at the corporation for up to ten years. Some of them resented my being placed in a position of authority over them. What they resented even more was that I held them to corporation rules and policies. Another underlying problem was that I was of a different race then the rest of the staff and there were walls of mistrust.

Tension on the job built up between myself and one other worker. At one point he exploded, calling me several names in front of ten of our clients. This gesture undermined my authority, because our clients liked this worker very much. He also said that he would have to request a transfer to another facility that the corporation owned which was a half hour further from his home than our facility. He said he would have to do this to avoid becoming violent with me. He didn't want to beat me up and cause his brother, the executive director, to lose a good employee, he added. He saw me as a good worker, but one that he couldn't get along with.

He went ahead and requested the transfer, and for six months, drove an hour further each day just so that he would not have to work with me as his superior. One day while at work at the other facility he suffered a mild heart attack. This now made it impossible for him to safely make the trip to and from the facility so far from his home. He then came back to our facility. Luckily, I had learned many things about how to build unity from my last Mariapolis.

Before arriving at work I would pause momentarily and tell God that I really wanted this worker, who had become an "enemy," to feel only love from me. At work I would always say hello to him as I would to a true friend. But that wasn't enough. I had learned that Christians have to love concretely. Since he was recovering from a heart attack, I decided that I could help him gradually recover his strength by inviting him to a health club with me. He had been an excellent football player in his younger years and suffered greatly now from being weak and having little physical endurance.

I went to his home early every other day, got him out of bed, and took him to my health club. He and I went through months of serious workouts and I gradually coached him back to health. During each workout we talked and it became as much an enjoyable social event as it was a physical one.

During this time my supervisor resigned. I really wanted the job, because besides the experience and increased pay, it would allow me to work better hours. I had been working every weekend for eighteen months, and I was tired of being away from my wife every weekend. To my surprise, this gentleman wrote a letter to his brother, the executive director, recommending that I be given the job. I could hardly believe it! I got the promotion.

When my baby was baptized, this man called and said he wanted to prepare all the food for the christening party, free of charge. I could have cried. He said he wanted to do it because I had helped him recover his strength after his heart attack. The meal was a wonderful full-course dinner, perfectly prepared for over twenty people.

M. M.

the young and the gospel

A sixteen year old who has known the Gen life "from zero years on up" recently took a look at his life and spoke about peer pressure. "It is easy to get caught up in it and do what everybody else does. There are times when I realize I'm slipping. When I remember what I learned as a Gen it helps me make the right decisions for myself." The following are two of his experiences about reaching out to others.

There was a boy in my school that nobody accepted. His bad reputation started all the way back in the second or third grade from what I heard. Rumors passed around about him and people knew about him and disliked him even before they met him. I thought that those feelings couldn't run deep; they could be changed. He was a messy-haired guy who didn't care much about his appearance.

We were in the same study hall. One day in the hallway I stopped by his locker and asked him: "Is there any way I can help you? Are you having problems? He gave me the brush-off and didn't say a word. He walked away as if to say, "Who is this guy anyway?"

That was my first attempt. I thought there must be something more I could do to get through to him. Two periods later we were in study hall and I tried to help him with his math homework. I tried to start a conversation but he just kept his head down as if he had nothing to do with the rest of the world. But everybody has something to do with the rest of the world so I continued to try to get through to him.

Weeks went by and other students started to notice that I was giving him attention; they noticed that something was going on. One day a student started to give him a hard time and I called out, "Hey, leave him alone!" Another student after that said, "Yeh, cut it out! and still another one agreed with us. Pretty soon half the class was noticing him and being nicer to him. When people started giving him a chance he actually began acting more friendly.

I am on track in my high school and sometimes we practice in the halls when it is too cold outside. The school doesn't have an indoor track. One day another student was running the halls with me and there was a girl, too. The girl asked "Are either of you Catholic? I said "yes" and the boy said "no, I don't believe in God." He told her to go ahead and tell the joke she wanted to tell. I don't remember the joke but that wasn't really the point.

Later on, I started to talk to him about God. He was open. He had different objections to believing that God exists and he asked a lot of questions. It was a beautiful conversation and I could tell it was important for him.

P.B.

LOVE IS STRONGER

At the Mariapolis in New York

Part IV

Lazarus Come Out, *a book that many of our readers know well since it was published by New City Press is the autobiography of Matteo Silvan. It is the interesting story of a married man deeply immersed and interested in the secular world, the story of a focolarino.* **Love is Stronger** *starts where the other ended, with the death of his wife Teresa and with the beginning of a new chapter in his life.* **Living City** *is publishing it in installments.*

by Matteo Silvan

What I have related up to now, leads me to think of those who will one day read these pages. Everything I have freely received and everything I must freely share. But if I would like this sharing of mine to be a gift and not an enigma I should honestly recount to my readers what were the passages i.e., the moments of God through which I arrived at this experience of Love consuming suffering, of believing in life even when death knocks at the door.

Many already know my story. For those who do not I will tell it now.

Forgive me for taking an easy way out but I thought it best to recount it as I shared it at a conference in the United States in 1980. It is the testimony I gave in a Mariapolis, one of the summer gatherings lasting several days wherein members of the Focolare Movement or people who want to learn about the Movement live as a family and try to grow in their love for God. A customary part of the program is that some individuals share their efforts to live the Gospel and the fruits this has brought about in their lives.

I chose this text because it was particularly concise due to the fact that as I spoke, it was alternately being translated into English.

Restlessness

My dear, my very dear friends. I apologize for speaking Italian. But I think it is better that I speak to you in good Italian rather than in poor English.

I have been asked to share something about my life. Well then, here I am.

Up until a few years ago I worked as an Inspector General for the Ministry of the Treasury in Italy. I have always been occupied therefore with budgets, banks, stocks and investments in Italy and abroad: Rome, London and Paris, in war and peace. These activities although good and useful in themselves, did very little for my spiritual life. I attained a good financial and social position but I lived without enthusiasm, without great sufferings and without great joys.

By the time I reached fifty I began to experience a deep anguish. I had everything in life: health, family, money ... yet I was restless. I felt deep inside that everything I had was temporary and the thought that death could destroy everything from one moment to the next, tormented me.

Then one day in 1954—we were in Trieste at the time—two young women came to the door looking for my elder daughter, Lucia. They had met her a few years earlier in Rome but had lost contact. In fact, in 1952 Lucia had come with me to London and then to Trieste. That day, unfortunately, neither Lucia nor anyone else of the family was at home and this was what I told the two

visitors. As they were about to leave, however, I stopped them. I wanted to know what kind of friends my daughter had. They were different from all the others that usually came to the house. I could see it in their eyes. I invited them in and began asking questions. One after the other, their replies surprised me. I asked myself from what cloud they had fallen....

Initially they explained that they belonged to a group which tried to live the teachings of the Gospel. "Well," I said to myself, "there's nothing wrong with that." Then they spoke of their "leader," Chiara, who had understood during World War II that everything is temporary, everything passes. In fact, the bombs were destroying everything, both people and possessions. I thought to myself: "That is precisely the way reality is."

They said this person Chiara had consecrated her life to God.

At this point I began to look at them with suspicion. What connection could there be between the bombs and God? I was perplexed even more when they told me that God is Love. How was it possible to speak of God who is love amid the death and destruction of the war?

For me it was a mystery but for these two women it was all very simple. "War is the result of hatred," they said. "Peace instead is born from Love, the love that comes from the Father and makes us all brothers and sisters. War results when we reject this fatherhood of God and people, individuals as well as nations, try to dominate over others."

Their words were slow and measured, they looked at me in the eyes as they spoke. They recognized my confusion and tried to explain further: "The world needs to live the precept: "Love your neighbor as yourself." It seems that we less than ever are aware of another precept implicitly contained in it: "Love other countries as you love your own."

"It is too beautiful ... but not for me. I'm a very busy man. Gently, he replied, "That isn't an obstacle. What is essential is that, in all that you do there be love, pure and unselfish love."

I was surprised and didn't know what to say. I told them I had rarely heard God spoken of as Love. "Where is this Love in the world?" I asked. "It's true," they answered, "You may not find this Love in the world. It is precisely for this reason that we have given our lives to God and as lay people —Mary was a lay person—try to bring Love where there is no love.

My confusion only increased and I asked myself how they could be so naive. "This is utopia," I thought yet they were absolutely convinced of what they were saying. I tried to get their reaction about something which concerned me greatly: social justice. I asked them their opinion on the subject thinking that in this way I would trip them up. They responded with utmost simplicity that even the problems of social injustice would be resolved with love. Only love, in fact, enables us to make those sacrifices which are necessary if we want everyone to have enough to live on. It would be necessary however—they said —that an always greater number of persons, closely united among them be ready—even at the cost of their lives—to bring Love where there is no Love.

After two hours of conversation I was totally disarmed. From their point of view, in fact, everything was simple and logical: terribly logical.

When they stood up to leave, I thanked them and felt a twinge of guilt inside. As if in an effort to clear my concience, I took from my pocket all the money I had and gave it to them. They looked at me in surprise. I tried to justify my action by saying that I wanted to help—through them—with a certain need they had happened to mention. ►

This name ... Jesus

I very soon forgot the visit but the two young women did not. Some months later one of them invited me to a "Mariapolis" which was being held that year (1955) in Vigo di Fassa, in the Dolomite Mountains of Italy. I needed to rest and I thought some time in the mountains would be uplifting.

When I arrived up there I was warmly welcomed by a group of young people. They all smiled and greeted me as if they had always known me. I immediately felt at ease and I thought I had finally found the healthy mountain air I needed with the plus of pleasant company.

As the days progressed I very quickly became aware of a joy in the people I had met there that had nothing to do with mountain air. Clearly they had found—through this love that they had told me about—the meaning of life, but there was also something else. As I met and spoke to more people I realized that the center of everyone's thoughts was Jesus.

This name ... Jesus! What an impression it made on me to hear it pronounced! People usually used "Christ" or other titles, but I rarely heard "Jesus." Hearing it now sounded so sweet and welcoming. These people spoke of him as if he were a member of the family; someone you could not see but who was always present. In him they were finding that sense of fulfillment in life which filled them with joy.

I realized that the words spoken there were based on a reality you could grasp just by observing the smiles on these young people.

I was skimming over the surface, however. One of them, in fact, explained to me how they had come to know Jesus, the Savior of all, not only in his life filled with miracles, in the splendor of his resurrection, but also in his death on the cross, in his experience of being hated by the world and abandoned by his own friends. He had plummeted into an abyss of pain and darkness where all seemed lost, even the love of the Father. In that abyss—they explained—Jesus, a man among men, identified himself with all the lost and desperate persons of this earth. With them, in that moment of darkness, he emitted a tremendous cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

I listened in awe to their words about a Jesus who was new to me. "This was the culmination of a suffering which was the summation of all sufferings," I was told. It was freely accepted, and even preferred. This suffering of infinite value speaks of a love that exceeds our capacity to understand. As he turned to the Father murmuring, "into your hands I entrust my spirit," he was able to lead to salvation even those who fall into darkness and sin but who recognize him and latch onto him."

As I was trying to understand these concepts which were so new to me, I had a vague impression that they were just an abstraction, removed from reality. But could I disregard them? Looking these young people in the face once again I thought that it was perhaps true that every suffering, if accepted and loved, loses its bitterness and leads to union with God.

Heaven is not for me

I felt it very strongly the first time I went to Mass with them. The joy that surrounded me was the sign—as they had said—of the presence of the Risen Jesus among us.

And that Mass? As it proceeded, the grace of God opened my eyes, soul and lastly my mind. They sang and I thought I was listening to a choir of angels. At one point I thought of heaven ... then, I do not know why, I felt the weight of all my faults and failings ... and, filled with emotion, I burst into tears.

The Mass ended and gradually everyone went outside. Deeply moved, I stayed in my seat. I did not want to be seen with tears in my eyes. Gradually I recovered myself and a thought made its way within me: "This is all pure illusion; it is too beautiful to be true. and even if it were ... heaven is not for me."

When I left the church a priest approached me in order to greet me. We had met in Trieste in the past and I immediately poured out my soul to him. It all seemed marvelous I told him, "but it is too beautiful ... and, at any rate, not for me. I'm fifty years old and a very busy man. I have a wife and children ... how could I dedicate myself to such a life?"

Gently the priest replied, "I know you are a very busy person but this is not an obstacle. You can peacefully continue to attend to your usual business. What is essential is that, in all that you do, there be love, pure and unselfish love. Where there is this kind of love, there is God.... After all, love lived while doing one's job is already prayer.... Believe me, a person can live in the world and be, at the same time, active and contemplative."

I looked at him aghast; I could not believe it could all be so simple. He insisted, "It is enough that you be generous and pure of heart. Of course, it takes humility, too.... One has to become as a little child ... because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them."

At this point—I do not know why—I had a flash of inner light. I suddenly overcame my doubts and "rational" thoughts advising me to be prudent. As my ego cried out "no, no" within me, I took both hands of the priest and whispered in a clear voice, "I understand! I want to be with all of you ... but you will all have to help me!"

That was my first "yes." A few months later I met Igino Giordani, the great Catholic writer who, with Chiara Lubich, had rediscovered the vocation to sanctity of lay people even though they are immersed in the world and have family responsibilities. At the same time, in spite of my age, I was accepted as a married focolarino in the Work of Mary, which is the officially recognized name of the Focolare. This was like a beginning of a second life.

(to be continued)

The church of Vigo di Fassa in the Dolomite Mountains of Italy where the 1955 Mariapolis took place. At that time there was only one Mariapolis held each year.

The Spirit of Assisi:

Act II

The spirit of Assisi continues in the August 3rd and 4th gathering which will take place in Japan. The religions of the world will once again gather to pray for world peace. "The Young for Unity" of the Focolare prepared a message for the religious leaders signed by young people around the globe who pledge to work and pray for peace.

Mount Hiei in Japan (a few miles from Kyoto) has been considered home to Japanese Buddhists for centuries. This year marks the 1200th anniversary of its founding. For several years now within the Japanese religious realm celebration plans have been underway for the 3rd and 4th of August.

Then to everyone's surprise, the World Day of Prayer for Peace took place in Assisi. October 27, 1986 was the historic day, the first time in history to see heads of religions from all over the world meet in order to pray for peace. Everyone recognized that it was the beginning of something that would not end there "I believe that a new era is before us," Subuh Karan Desani, a Jainist, said in an interview by the Vatican Radio.

The representative of Sikhism added, "We are walking along the path of reconciliation among the different religions and among different countries, as well" and the Moslem leader Mohammed Majoui Taalibi said, "I ardently hope that other occasions similar to this will take place, in other locations, and that these efforts toward peace continue constantly and untiringly so that concrete results can be achieved."

Among the participants at the prayer gathering was also the 91 year old leader of Mount Hiei, Eitai Yamada. The Buddhists present were particularly touched by the event and the idea began to develop among them of transforming the anniversary celebration of Mount Hiei into a second Assisi. The spirit of Assisi opened new frontiers; it was necessary to continue along this path.

On October 28th, during the gathering of religious heads other than Christian at the Sacred Convent in Assisi, the Japanese Buddhists extended an invitation to the world's religious leaders to meet in Japan and Eitai Yamada reiterated this during the audience with Pope John Paul II the following day. The Pope immediately promised the participation of the Catholic Church in the conviction that "we cannot be satisfied and sit back with the success of the gathering at Assisi. The world has urgent need for the spirit of Assisi to be kept alive as a source of hope for the future." Pope John Paul II will be represented by Cardinal Arinze, president of the Secretariat for non-Christians.

But what has the effect of Assisi been on the general population? The impact has been profound. The World Day of Prayer for Peace communicated the message that in order to achieve peace in our world, human efforts—indispensable as they are—are not enough. We must ask for peace from God and not exclude him in our efforts to work for its attainment. That day was a witness to the fact that all people are called to give their contribution to build it. It created a climate of respect, an attitude of openness and dialogue with those

Message of the Gen 3 to the Leaders of the Great Religions

TO ALL THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GREAT RELIGIONS:

We heard you are meeting again in Kyoto. This has brought us great joy.

The Assisi Day of prayer gave us great hope: it was a meeting among brothers and sisters who for the first time met altogether: a "historical" event for humanity.

We thank you deeply for the witness of unity you gave to the world, for the mutual respect and total commitment you showed and for such intensely felt prayer. Your prayer gave many the certainty that peace is possible; that it is a "gift", and together we can ask for it to the One who listens to us on High.

We are the "Young for Unity" and we are present in 160 countries and on all continents. Although we are from such different nationalities, cultures and faiths, we are linked by a great idea which has become the commitment of our life: to live to build a united world. We want to build a world where peace can be a reality. For this reason we wish to involve the greatest possible number of people, because we know that all are called to build unity and peace.

In approaching each person with universal love, we experience that all barriers between races, religions and generations collapse. We discover that our differences are not an obstacle but are precious and irreplaceable in contributing towards building the "civilization of love."

We especially ask you to tell the children of your communities that we want to live with them for the future of humanity. We are certain that if we build it together, day by day, there will be a future of peace for all!

You can count on us!

The "Young for Unity"

who have a faith different from one's own. It represented a model to which social and political groups of different persuasions could refer in their relationships with one another and among nations.

We are all affected in some way by this new mentality. Even the younger generation is. Their response offers a genuine ray of hope.

A recent survey carried out among youngsters between the ages of twelve and fifteen showed that many have a dim view of the world. To the question, "What do you think of the future of humanity?" The majority of adolescents spoke of fear of nuclear warfare, uncertainty over future job prospects resignation in the face of ecological disasters. The main concern they cited, however, was peace. One fifteen year old responded, "According to me the threat of nuclear war is hanging over humanity." And a twelve year old, "I don't think I'll like the future because we are surrounded by wars and pollution."

Concern about war made one twelve year old speak of a horrible future, of a tomorrow that "will not exist; the best thing then is for the world to end," as a fifteen year old girl affirmed. And a boy of the same age, "In any case it will be worse than now," he said and another boy, the future "won't be very beautiful because we're doomed. " Those who were more hopeful and optimistic did foresee some improvement but their answers were always followed by many "ifs". One thirteen year old, for example, thought the future could be better only "if humanity were more intelligent," and a girl, "The future would be fabulous, if people would only stop killing."

In some youngsters a sense of responsibility appears to exist together with a sense of powerlessness before the fact ►

that they are little and isolated from the world's problems: "It all depends on us, " said a boy of thirteen, and another: "We are the future but a lot of young people couldn't care less."

I confess that their answers took me by surprise. I didn't imagine this age group would be so pessimistic about the future.

Perhaps the answer of another thirteen year old explains it: "When we turn on the TV or the radio, we hear only bad news. " How can youngsters hope for peace in the world when the overwhelming thrust of the news of world events is so alarming: terrorism, violence, disasters, tensions between the superpowers, etc.

It is clear then why an event such as Assisi offers hope. The problem remains, however, "What can young people do to bring peace in the world? Can we tap into the enthusiasm characteristic of their age to offer them constructive answers to work toward to improve the situation?

Truthfully, over the last few years as never before youngsters have been involved in peace initiatives on a world level. Their active participation is a sign of the times. Last year hundreds of thousands of them from around the world were involved in Unicef's project for the relay carrying the Torch of Peace around the globe. The interest of youngsters shows their desire to be protagonists of a world in evolution.

Now a new initiative by the "Young for Unity" is once again uniting their contemporaries in signing a letter they wrote to the representatives of the world's religions who will meet in Kyoto on Mount Hiei. It is an opportunity to lend a voice to those who want a future of peace.

It is also a demonstration of support from the grass roots for the success of the second Assisi and represents a continuity of commitment on the part of the Young for Unity after their initiative of last December at the United Nations (see Living City vol. 26 no. 2).

Now their message has received wide acceptance internationally from East to West in both the secular and religious worlds. All around the globe the Young for Unity are gathering signatures from youngsters of different religions, races and nationalities who share their desire to work for peace in the world.

If it is true that youngsters today are sensitive to the threats of war it is equally true that they are fortunate to be growing up in the prospect of a united world. Their enthusiastic response in favor of this mentality represents the greatest hope.

Marcello De Stefano

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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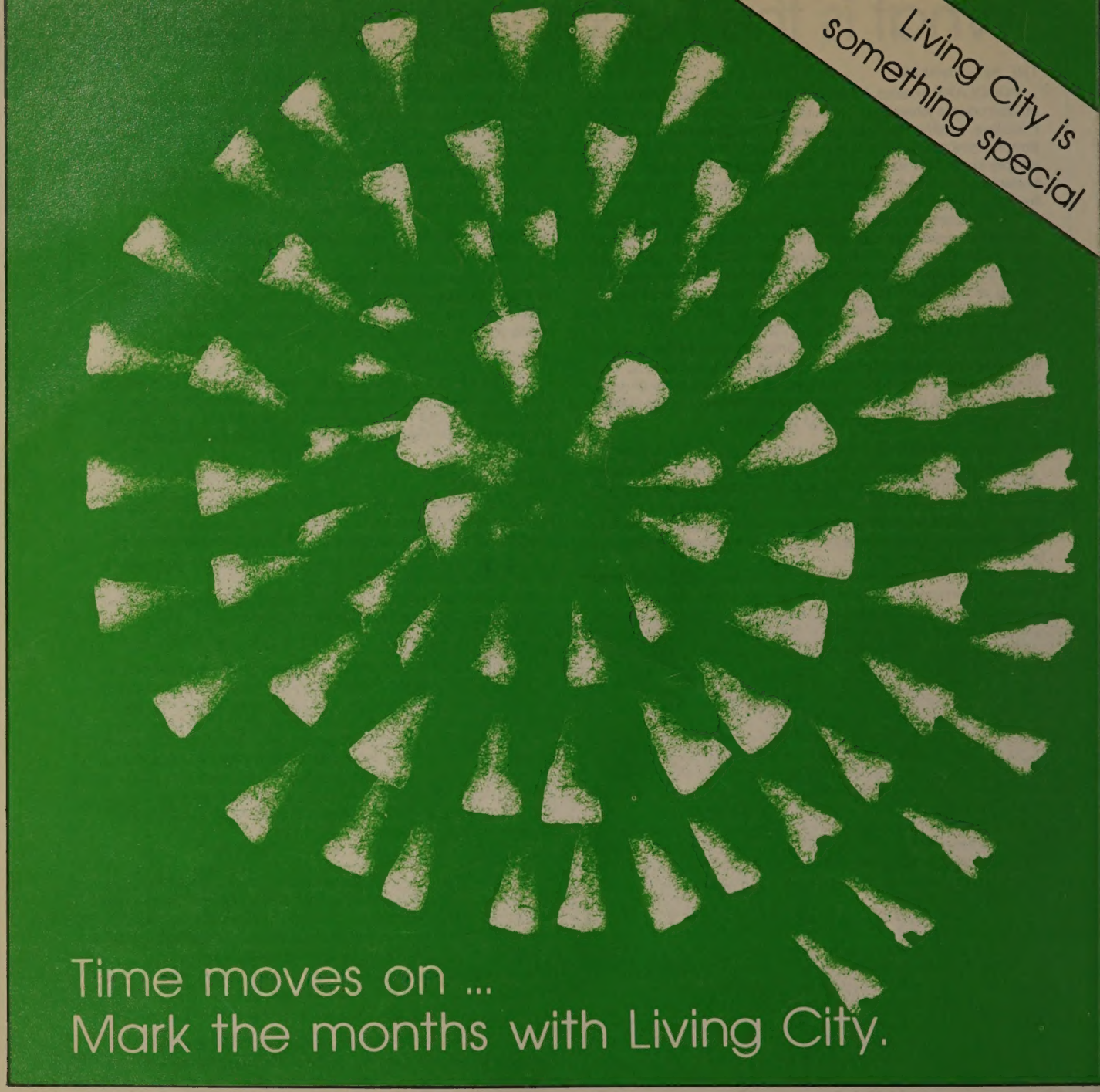

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